

Wellness in Nebraska Schools



Nebraska Middle and High School Administrators' Attitudes toward Physical Activity and Healthy Eating within Schools

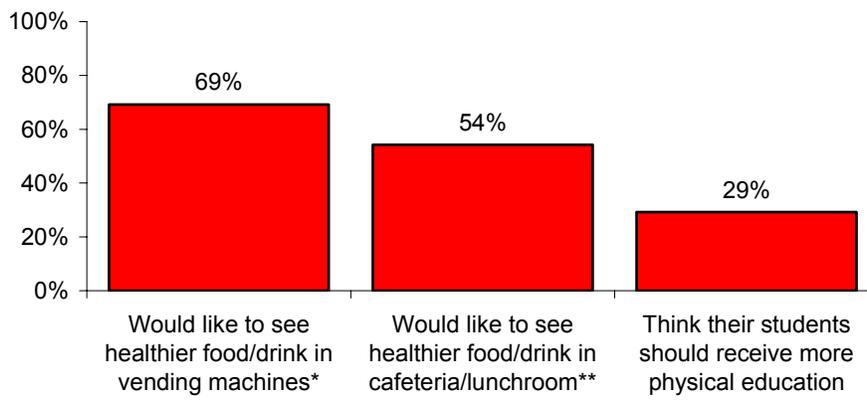
INTRODUCTION

To ensure a healthy future for Nebraska's youth, proper nutrition and physical activity must be encouraged through a variety of different settings where youth spend large amounts of time. Schools can establish environments that encourage healthy behaviors and teach youth the skills necessary for lifelong health. Support from school administrators along with a school health committee or advisory group (with representation from school staff, students, community members, and parents) can provide the foundation necessary for stimulating change. This mini-report describes the attitudes of Nebraska middle and high school administrators regarding the prevention of obesity and promotion of physical activity and healthy eating within their schools.

FINDINGS, reported during 2005 by administrators (primarily principals) within Nebraska's middle and high schools

- Overall, administrators' attitudes positively supported physical activity and healthy eating. More specifically:
 - 4 in every 5 (82%) felt that obesity was an important or extremely important issue for the students within their school
 - 2 in every 3 (67%) would like to see more presentations and/or trainings on childhood obesity for administrators
 - 7 in every 10 (69%) would like to see healthier food and drink options available in their vending machines
 - Roughly half (54%) would like to see healthier food and drink options available in their cafeteria
 - 3 in every 10 (29%) thought students in their school should receive more physical education (PE)
 - 1 in every 8 (13%) reported that there has been a reduction in the amount of PE for students at their school within the past 5 years

Figure 1: Nebraska Public Middle and High School Administrators Attitudes Towards Foods and Physical Education Within Their Schools , 2005



*Among administrators of schools that have vending machines

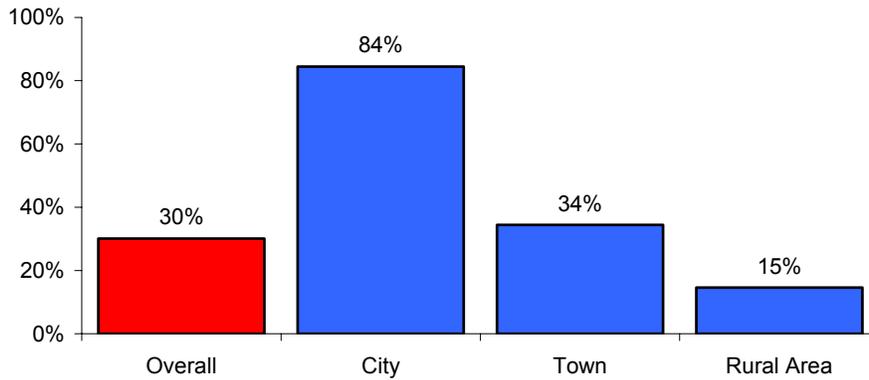
**Among administrators of schools that have a cafeteria or school lunchroom

Note: questions were asked independently of each other, sum of bars does not equal 100%

Source: 2005 Nebraska School Administrator Survey

- 3 in every 10 schools (30%) reported that their school or school district had a school health committee or advisory group that developed policies, coordinated activities, or sought student and family involvement in programs that address health.
- The percentage of schools with a health committee or advisory group was substantially lower for combined middle and high schools (13%) compared to independent middle schools (52%) and high schools (42%). Similarly, this percentage was lower for schools within rural communities (15%) and towns (34%) when compared to those within cities (84%).

Figure 2: Percentage of Nebraska Public Middle and High Schools That Had a School Health Committee or Advisory Group*, 2005



*Defined as a committee/group at the district or individual school level that develops policies, coordinates activities, or seek student or family involvement in programs that address health issues
 Note: City=schools within a MSA that are in a city or on the fringe of a city; town=schools located outside a MSA that are located within a town; rural area=schools located within or outside a MSA that are in a rural area
 Source: 2005 Nebraska School Administrator Survey

CONCLUSION

The support from public middle and high school administrators in Nebraska, regarding the importance of obesity prevention and environments that support physical activity and healthy eating, was largely positive. However, a low percentage of schools reported having a school health committee or advisory group. Through federal legislation, school districts receiving federal child nutrition funding (virtually all K-12 schools within Nebraska) must adopt a local school wellness policy by June of 2006¹. This process will allow schools to look at their health environment and opportunities for making improvements. As a result, the Nebraska Cardiovascular Health Program is hopeful that schools and community members will work together to find feasible solutions that will improve the physical activity and healthy eating behaviors of Nebraska’s youth.

METHODS

The Nebraska Health and Human Services System collected the data presented in this fact sheet between December 2004 and March 2005 through a random mail survey of public middle and high school principals in Nebraska. A total of 284 schools completed the survey, for an 82 percent response rate. Results were weighted to represent all public middle and high schools in Nebraska.

Fact sheet was prepared by the Nebraska Cardiovascular Health (CVH) Program, March 2006. For additional results, methodology, or other information about these data or the Nebraska CVH Program, please visit the CVH Program website www.hhss.ne.gov/CVH or call 402-471-2101.



¹ Section 2004 of Public Law 108-265–June 30, 2004; Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004. United States Department of Agriculture. 5 December 2005. <<http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/healthy/108-265.pdf>>